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homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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SUBJECT: "Whispering to Recruit Workers." Information from extension specialists of the War Food Administration

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Farmers throughout the country put in their crops with the faith that somehow or other they would get them harvested. If this faith is justified and enough food grown for war need, it will take all the spare time that every woman in the country can give. Housewives with a few hours, stenographers with a weeks vacation, school girls with a whole summer, professional women with their Saturdays off, swing-shift workers with a few daylight hours to contribute are all needed. For we know as well as the farmer knows that food is a vital war material and no food must go to waste for lack of harvest hands.

When the call goes out on the radio or through the newspapers, women are finding ways of helping. For example, one Saturday in Tyler, Texas, Mrs. J. K. Bateman, a local dentist's wife read in the paper that there was an emergency need for berry pickers. Mrs. Bateman was not one to put off 'till tomorrow. She went immediately to the phone and called up County Agent C. R. Heaton offering her services. He welcomed her offer and promised to call her later telling her when and where to report.

That very afternoon the county labor committee met and Agent Heaton told of Mrs. Bateman's offer. Up popped the woman member of the committee. She said she wanted to hire the first woman volunteer, and added: "tell her to bring along her friends, too."

The next morning was Sunday and Mrs. Bateman went to Sunday school as usual. She told her class what she had read in the paper about her conversation with the county agent and about the woman farmer who wanted her to come and bring some

other women. Her close friend Mrs. C.C. McDonald, wife of Tyler doctor, spoke up and said she believed they could take the responsibility for harvesting the 6 acres of berries on that particular farm.

Three times a week the women went out to the farm. Sometimes there was one carload of them and sometimes three carloads. They didn't ride the big trucks with the other volunteers from town because these women had to get their menfolks off to work, their children off to school and do a few household tasks. Ten o'clock each morning found them in the fields. It was growing hot by that time in Texas, but they didn't complain about the heat, the sand, the wasp stings or the spilled drinking water. They brought their lunch and ate in the shade of the beautiful old trees near the farm home. They learned to flop down on the grass and rest after they had eaten like the soldiers do.

The women who went regularly were housewives, young and middle aged. One was a beauty parlor operator who did a good repair business after the picking was over. Some were wives of Army men stationed at nearby Camp Fannin. Practically all of them had sons, brothers, nephews, or sisters in the armed forces overseas or in war industry. Their association gave both the farm woman and the city women a new respect for each other. They sacrificed their own comfort and did hot hard grueling work because they believed in the need of saving food to win the war.

Thirty-one of these Texas women picked berries on shares - a plan that appeals to housewives interested in preserving fruits and vegetables for next winter. The whole home demonstration club went out to pick strawberries in some places in Tennessee, many of them taking their pay in berries. Sometimes a group of women get together to do the canning - pooling their pressure cookers and equipment after they have been in the fields picking beans or in the orchard picking peaches or plums.

Loganberries and boysenberries in Oregon, cherries in Michigan, tomatoes in Jersey - some fruit or vegetable in many localities will be ripe this month, all ready for harvesting and it is up to the women to see that all of it is harvested, to be sure that no food goes to waste this year through lack of harvest hands.

Oregon women found whispering campaigns very effective in recruiting workers. Block leaders and neighborhood leaders canvassed every home asking the women when and where they could work. Just before the leader made her house to house visit, women in clubs, churches and lodges started their whispering campaign. Each woman confidentially told a friend about how the crop was ripe and ready but the scandal was that there were no pickers and the food might go to waste. This advance tip served to make many women think about the food supply and by the time the leader came around she had figured out some way to help bring in the harvest.

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